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OPERATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR HOMELAND DEFENSE

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of the Air Force.

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"It is no longer a matter of if—but rather when—a weapon of mass destruction will be used against the people and institutions of the United States."¹

In response to the growing threat of terrorism with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, the United States government has developed a national concept of operations for responding to their use. Therein lies the problem. This national concept of operations really consists of multiple agencies at the local, state and federal levels reacting to an incident with no clear operational organization for efficient command and control as well as effective response. I believe that when a terrorist incident with a weapon of mass destruction does occur, there is the potential for catastrophic results. Thousands, maybe millions of people would die and suffer serious injury because our nation is unprepared. A major step in the right direction to correct this problem is to build an organization under a single commander with the responsibility for domestic preparedness, response, and consequence management. Only with the proper command organization and subsequent unity of effort can we ensure the most effective employment of the many forces and resources currently tasked with homeland defense against and response to weapons of mass destruction. The purpose of this paper is to describe the threat to our nation and the current strategies that have to date kept us free from a terrorist attack with weapons of mass destruction. I will then describe the many organizations that are currently involved in the domestic preparedness and response mission. The thrust of the paper is to propose an operational organization that will effectively and efficiently be able to respond to the terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States.

What is the Current Threat?

The United States is often described as the sole remaining superpower in the post-Cold War world. It enjoys military dominance with both conventional and nuclear weapons. But it is precisely because of this fact that potential adversaries would be likely to use asymmetric means such as nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons to challenge U.S. power or to make a political statement. This threat is being magnified by the proliferation of technologies associated with these weapons. According to a statement made by the Secretary of Defense in the Department of Defense's November 1997 report,

Proliferation: Threat and Response:

With advanced technology and a smaller world of porous borders, the ability to unleash mass sickness, death, and destruction today has reached a far greater order of magnitude. A lone madman or nest of fanatics with a bottle of chemicals, a batch of plague-inducing bacteria, or a crude bomb can threaten or kill tens of thousands of people in a single act of malevolence. These are not far-off or far-fetched scenarios. They are real—here and now.²

These threats are a common concern noted in most national security policy documents.

The threat or actual use of weapons of mass destruction may come from virtually anywhere. The more likely weapon is chemical or biological, given that nuclear technology is much more difficult to obtain and weaponize. The FBI is already tracking several groups within the United States that have acquired or have shown some inclination to use a weapon of mass destruction.³ We already had one extremely close call with disaster in the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1993. In this incident the force of the explosion vaporized the cyanide gas that had been packed with the explosives. Only luck and the stupidity of the terrorists prevented a catastrophe.

On other fronts, eyewitnesses have reported lax security at several of Russia's declared chemical weapons storage facilities.⁴ It is not hard to imagine cash-strapped guards selling these types of weapons for profit. They could then be launched from any of the thousands of Soviet-made artillery pieces that can be found throughout the world.

Iraq developed a substantial chemical and biological weapons capability in the 1970s and 1980s. This capability included research and development facilities, stockpiles of munitions, a variety of delivery systems, and the doctrine and training to use these systems on the battlefield. By 1990 they had the largest chemical weapons production capability in the Third World, annually producing tons of blister and nerve agents.⁵ Iraq had also developed biological weapons by the time of the invasion of Kuwait. Their biological program consisted of the development of botulism and anthrax, with production at four facilities near Baghdad.⁶

These are only a sampling of the numerous threats that may be found within our own borders as well as outside the United States. How then have we been able to avoid a successful attack to date?

Current U.S. Strategies

The national policy on the defense against the use and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is supported by strategies of prevention, protection, and deterrence. In a July 1998 paper entitled *Meeting the Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Secretary of Defense William Cohen wrote:

There is no single response to the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Instead we've got to prevent the spread of such weapons; we have got to protect ourselves by deterring their use, and we have to prepare for the possibility that they would be used right here in the United States.⁷

Prevention entails a wide range of arms control and nonproliferation programs to reduce the likelihood that a nation or group would use weapons of mass destruction. The Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty are examples of these initiatives. Treaties, though legally binding, are breakable. Additionally, not all countries are signatories to many of these treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction, i.e., India and Pakistan have yet to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty prohibiting nuclear testing. Some nations sign treaties only to ignore them. Iraq and North Korea are both signatories to the NPT but they continue to develop their nuclear weapons capabilities.

Protection entails being able to fight and defeat an enemy on a battlefield that has been contaminated with radiation, chemical agents, or germs. This has been the historical Department of Defense stake in protection and requires detection devices, decontamination gear, and protective suits. We will see that applying this strategy to domestic incidents or attacks opens up a whole new vista. Though detection devices will obviously have application to homeland defense, it is probably not feasible to provide protective clothing and breathing apparatus to every U.S. citizen. Another aspect of protection is vaccination against biological threats such as the recently instituted anthrax program in DoD. As with chemical protection, it may not be possible to protect all U.S. citizens from anthrax and the multitude of other toxins and diseases that could be used as weapons. The bottom line with this strategy is that a properly protected or immunized force signals potential enemies that asymmetrical operations will not stop us from our objectives. The problem is dealing with this on a domestic national level.

Prevention, protection, and the fact that the United States can respond with overwhelming conventional or even nuclear forces add up to deterrence. This offers an explanation why to date we have been immune from a successful attack with weapons of mass destruction.

If part of my thesis is that we have reached the limit of that deterrence and that an attack with weapons of mass destruction is imminent, we must next explore how our nation must be able to respond to this expected calamitous event. I will specifically focus on what I consider the most likely case, a terrorist attack using chemical or biological weapons.

In a situation where these weapons have been used in the United States, the crisis would be managing the response and the consequences. It would be an extremely complex task made worse by the lack of an efficient operational organization having the proper unity of effort. According to Milan Vego, "At the operational level and higher, success is difficult to achieve without having unity of effort through unity of command. Historically, a divided command has been invariably a source of great weakness and has often yielded fatal consequences."⁸ I believe the situation described by Vego is exactly what our dilemma would be with regard to responding to a chemical or biological attack by terrorists. I would go as far as to term it a crisis but my thesis can only be proven when an incident takes place. This is not to say our national leadership has not acknowledged this problem. In 1996 Congress passed Public Law 104-21, the Defense Against Weapons of Mass Destruction Act. This was necessary because as the law describes;

"(19) the U.S. lacks adequate planning and countermeasures to address the threat of nuclear, radiological, biological, and chemical terrorism . . . (21) State and local

emergency response personnel are not adequately prepared or trained for incidents involving nuclear, radiological, biological, and chemical terrorism; (22) Exercises of the Federal, State, and local response to nuclear, radiological, biological, and chemical terrorism have revealed serious deficiencies in preparedness and severe problems in coordination.”⁹ (emphasis added)

This same law required the Secretary of Defense to establish and maintain at least one chemical-biological domestic terrorism rapid response team. In response to this law, DoD is establishing a Chemical-Biological Quick Reaction Force (CBQRF) with the Secretary of the Army as executive agent. As such, he is tasked to ensure full coordination and integration of all DoD assets. This would include the already-existing Army National Guard and Army Reserve chemical defense units, some of which are located at Army chemical munitions storage sites.

This just begins to scratch the surface of the Department of Defense units and organizations with domestic preparedness and response missions. The Army also has the Chemical-Biological Defense Command, which is collocated with the DoD Office of Domestic Preparedness. These agencies are responsible for the first-responder training program. The objective of this effort is to complete training for 126 major metropolitan areas and cities within three years. The House of Representatives Committee on National Security believed that this program would be an appropriate mission for the National Guard and should be considered by DoD and the governors of states. Organizationally this exacerbates the already blurred boundaries between state and federal missions of the Guard.

Continuing with DoD organizations, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is currently working on proof-of-concept demonstrations for multi-spectral sensors for detection of chemical agents from medium and high altitude platforms. The

Marine Corps has established its own Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF). CBIRF includes reconnaissance, detection, decontamination, medical, security, and service support elements. It has the capability to provide command and control support, conduct detection, decontamination, triage, and is deployable.

On March 17, 1998 Secretary Cohen formally announced the DoD efforts in domestic preparation and response to terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction. DoD personnel would train the first responders—the local police, firefighters, and medical technicians that would be first on the scene of an attack. DoD would also create the first ever rapid assessment teams, consisting of National Guard personnel dedicated solely to assisting local civilian authorities in the event of a chemical or biological attack. The teams would arrive on scene quickly, then ensure the affected areas received federal assistance as necessary. “This new initiative will be the cornerstone of U.S. strategy for preparing America’s defense against a possible use of weapons of mass destruction.”¹⁰ This program’s intent is to provide local and state governments increased capabilities to assess the nature of incidents and terrorists, and provide them with some reconnaissance and decontamination capabilities. It integrates Guard and Reserve units not only into state plans but also into the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) regions so that their response capabilities will become part of regional, state and local organizations. These teams are to be transportable by air and road.

The DoD process calls for reaction by escalating levels of response. The local firemen, police, and medical technicians will be first on the scene. If the nature of the incident is beyond their capabilities they will request help from the state level authorities. The state response may include the National Guard, but if beyond their capabilities, the

states will request federal help through FEMA at the regional level. The Department of Defense would then get involved directly in the form of a response task force. DoD is in a supporting role to other federal agencies in accordance with the federal response plan, even though federal law tasks DoD with domestic preparedness until at least this year. A new organization or civilian institution is supposed to assume responsibility after 1999.

Nothing has been announced yet but we could be looking at another significant precedence of DoD being used to solve domestic problems. Even so, FEMA is the lead agency for the management of consequences involving weapons of mass destruction.

DoD has many more organizations involved and subordinate to FEMA in the event of a domestic crisis. There are other command and control units, various defense laboratories and agencies as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Explosive ordnance disposal units, Army Technical Escort units, the Naval Medical Research Institute, and U.S. Forces Command, which is tasked with consequence management support to local authorities, are also involved. The aforementioned organizations all fall under the jurisdiction of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operation/Low Intensity Conflict. OSD/SOLIC has supervisory oversight and the Department of the Army is the lead action agency for DoD. The Army's Chemical-Biological Defense Command at Aberdeen has the responsibility to implement DoD initiatives.

The point of the preceding paragraphs is to show the redundancy and disorganization that can be found in the DoD efforts at homeland defense, response, and consequence management of chemical and biological attacks in the United States. When the local and state organizations are thrown in the mix, the organizational problems and response and crisis management dilemmas are magnified.

Other primary non-DoD players include the Office of Emergency Preparedness/Public Health Support and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The former is tasked with taking care of mass casualties in any crisis situation and the latter has their own Hazardous Materials Response Unit. From the medical perspective there are the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. Add in the Environmental Protection Agency, and even the Department of Transportation in the form of the U.S. Coast Guard Strike Team and we have increased our redundancy and potential for cataclysmic consequences due to improper planning, direction, coordination, and control of forces in the accomplishment of the mission.

The aforementioned national response initiatives are promising, but their implementation to date has been problematic and their ultimate effectiveness yet to be tested. In other words, the nation is moving in the right direction with these initiatives and the strategic planning, funding, and threat identification that accompanies them, but the question remains, will we be prepared when an incident occurs?

A Recipe for Disaster?

I believe we have the right players involved in all levels of response. Local, state and federal organizations will respond as needed depending upon the seriousness and scope of the incident. What is lacking is an organization geared to effective command and control. Proof to this inadequacy can be found if we look at the incident at Centennial Park at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996.

The Marine CBIRF had formed a headquarters in a location with easy access to most of the Olympic events. There was also a chemical-biological response team located

at Dobbins AFB near Atlanta. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had a campus with laboratories just north of Atlanta in Chamblee. This campus was only three miles from FBI regional headquarters where the command post for the entire Olympic games security was located. With all these organizations in place it seemed like an ideal location and situation to respond to any incident. But there was no indication that biological or chemical contamination was even considered by anyone after the bomb blast and so the response structure was never fully activated. What ensued was general confusion resulting from these many organizations convening at the site of the explosion. There was a lack of communication and coordination before the explosion as well as during the response. Again, the right people were there but there was little unity of effort. Undoubtedly, the results would have been disastrous if there had been chemical or biological weapons involved.

Organizational Recommendation

Addressing the effectiveness of response and consequence management of an attack with weapons of mass destruction must start with an organizational restructuring. As previously mentioned, I believe we have the right players, what we need is an organization structured to effectively and efficiently respond to the threat or actual use of chemical and biological weapons. The first and most important step is to establish a single commander so efforts will be coordinated and complementary. A single commander would be responsible for all aspects of the prevention and protection strategies to include response to and consequence management of incidents. Deterrence would remain as it is now, under the warfighting CINCs.

There are several possibilities for the command organization and where the leadership would come from. Given the Army National Guard will play a major role in training and responding, it would be logical to put the mission under their control. Another possibility would be to give the mission to the U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM). USACOM already has responsibility of “Providing military support to US civil authorities (MCSA) and military assistance for civil disturbances (MACDIS), subject to Secretary of Defense approval and/or applicable DoD guidance, within the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.”¹¹ Its headquarters staff would probably be able to readily adapt to the increased focus and control of this mission. A third option would be to create an entirely new “CINCdom” whose sole responsibility would be homeland defense against, response to, and consequence management of weapons of mass destruction attacks. Excluded would be military attacks with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons on cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, or air dropped bombs from aircraft as this could elicit a Single Integrated Operational Plan-type response and fall under U.S. Strategic Command’s responsibility. This option obviously requires standing up a new headquarters and staff. All three options put DoD as the lead agency. Although this may seem like a logical assignment, I believe DoD should be a supporting agency because of the myriad of other non-DoD organizations that must be a part of this mission. DoD must be able to concentrate on protecting its combat troops on the battlefield, an area in which it is still lacking robust capabilities.

I believe the most promising organizational solution is a standing Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF). A JIATF would ensure the ability to plan, direct, coordinate, and manage the disparate organizations in the accomplishment of the mission.

A single commander with the requisite headquarters and staff would have the authority to integrate the efforts of the existing organizations. Ideally the JIATF would also have responsibility for resource allocation and training, although realistically the budget would probably have to come from component organizations. A robust JIATF would be more effective with its own budget authority. I see this type of organization as the only way that the intent of Congress as put forth in PL104-201 could be met. This organization would simplify command and control and provide for unity of effort with centralized direction and decentralized execution.

A JIATF would be a functional type command organization and thus would have fixed responsibility for the routine and continuing functions such as training. The key to success would be in the unity of effort. When an incident involving chemical and/or biological weapons occurred, instead of a three-ring circus there would be a well-coordinated and efficient effort by component organizations. Communications would be from the on-scene commander through a regional headquarters (based upon FEMA regions) to the JIATF headquarters. All elements, from local first-responders, to the National Guard, to the headquarters would be networked for instant communications. At the first indication of chemical or biological involvement as reported by first-responders, the JIATF mission would be initiated.

Leadership of the JIATF could come from any component organization. It could be the National Guard commander or the head of FEMA. I don't believe the commander could be active duty military since in the final analysis the active duty military would play little or no part in the JIATF. This would allow regional and functional CINCs to get back to their existing missions. The National Guard and Reserves would be the

primary DoD components of the JIATF. These DoD components still report to the governors of their states as well as having a much more important piece of the federal mission of response and management of terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

One of the most difficult threats the United States faces today and for the foreseeable future is attack by terrorists or other radical groups with weapons of mass destruction. Deterrence achieved nuclear stability in the bipolar world of the Cold War and the U.S. foreswore chemical and biological weapons. But the U.S. lead in renouncing chemical and biological weapons has not adjusted the behavior of nations or groups still intent on obtaining these weapons. There is little we can do that will appreciably decrease the risk that someone will use these weapons against us. They cannot be ‘uninvented’ nor can the knowledge needed to create them erased. As long as there are people that will try to manufacture, sell, and deploy these weapons we must continue to rely on deterrence and protection to reduce the threat. Given the inevitability of a chemical or biological attack, deterrence and protection must be augmented by adequate response and consequence management. To accomplish this mission, a restructure of existing organizations is required. A JIATF would provide unity of command and effort, a simple and integrated command organization, speedy communications, and centralized control with decentralized execution. It will be expensive and probably step on a lot of organizational toes, but it could prove to be a lifesaver to countless citizens.

NOTES

¹ Chris Seiple, "Consequence Management: Domestic Response to Weapons of Mass Destruction," Parameters, Autumn 1997, 119.

² Department of Defense, Proliferation: Threat and Response (Washington: 1997), 2.

³ Chris Seiple, "Consequence Management: Domestic Response to Weapons of Mass Destruction," Parameters, Autumn 1997, 119.

⁴ Amy Smithson, "The Chemical Arms Threat," The Baltimore Sun, 12 November 1995, 5D.

⁵ Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress, (Washington: 1992), 640.

⁶ Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress, (Washington: 1992), 15.

⁷ William S. Cohen, "Meeting the Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction," USIA Electronic Journal, July 1988, 1.

⁸ Milan Vego, On Operational Art Third Draft (Naval War College 1998), 176.

⁹ "Defense Against Weapons of Mass Destruction Act," United States Public Law 104-201, Title XIV, secs. 19, 21, 22 (1996).

¹⁰ William S. Cohen, "Threat Posed to America by WMD," Speech, National Press Club, Washington, DC: 17 March 1998.

¹¹ Naval War College, Extracts from Unified Command Plan February 1998 (Washington DC: Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, 1998), 6.

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